

This Week in Washington

Pombo Speaker at San Joaquin Regional Transit Center Groundbreaking

Washington - U.S. Rep. Richard Pombo (R-CA 11), Chairman of the House Resources Committee, spoke at the groundbreaking of the new San Joaquin Regional Transit Center in Stockton, Friday, October 10, 2003 at 3:00 P.M. Pombo helped secure federal funding for construction of the center.

"I was proud to play a role in securing the federal funding for this important project and I am pleased to be part of the team that has made the Downtown Transit Center a reality," said Pombo. "This Transit Center will assist in meeting our goal of alleviating traffic and - as importantly - it will help create good paying jobs. The Transit Center is a key component in creating a seamless form of transportation that gets people from where they live to where they need to be whether work, school or doctor appointments. This project will help us continue to make this area one of the best places in the nation to live, work and raise a family. As demand on our transportation systems continues, I will do all I can to alleviate traffic congestion to increase our quality of life, protect our environment and create jobs."

Supreme Court to Decide Pledge Case

By ANNE GEARAN
WASHINGTON (AP)

The Supreme Court said today it will decide whether the Pledge of Allegiance recited by generations of American schoolchildren is an unconstitutional blending of church and state.

The case sets up an emotional showdown over God in the public schools and in public life. It will settle whether the phrase "one nation under God" will remain a part of the patriotic oath as it is recited in most classrooms.

The court will hear the case sometime next year.

The justices agreed to hear an appeal involving a California atheist whose 9-year-old daughter, like most elementary school children, hears the Pledge of Allegiance recited daily.

A national uproar followed a federal appeals court ruling last year that the reference to God made the pledge unconstitutional in public schools. That ruling, if allowed to stand, would strip the reference from the version of the pledge recited by about 9.6 million schoolchildren in California and other western states.

The First Amendment guarantees that government will not "establish" religion, wording that has come to mean a general ban on overt government sponsorship of religion in public schools and elsewhere.

The Supreme Court has already said that schoolchildren cannot be required to recite the oath that begins, "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America."

The court has also repeatedly barred school-sponsored prayer from classrooms, playing fields and school ceremonies.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said the First Amendment and the Supreme Court's precedents make clear that tax-supported schools cannot lend their imprimatur to a declaration of fealty to "one nation under God."

The White House hinted that an administration-written brief in the case could be in the offing, with Scott McClellan, President Bush's spokesman, (*cont. on page 2*)

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Brentwood Resident Selected to the Congressional Page Program in Washington, DC

Washington - U.S. Rep. Richard Pombo (R-CA 11), announces Daniel Boden of Brentwood has been selected to participate in the Congressional Page program.

The Congressional Page Program offers a unique and exciting opportunity for students in their junior year of high school to come to Washington, DC to live, work, and study as Pages. Along with their studies, Pages learn about the interactions of Congress. The practice of having Pages dates back over 200 years.

"Daniel is an exceptional young man with a bright future before him. I was honored to be able to nominate such a strong candidate to join the Page program," said Pombo.

"The Page program is an invaluable experience I can draw upon in my life while I pursue my dream of entering U.S. politics." Further, "I joined the Page Program to contribute to the Democratic process," said Daniel Boden.

The Page program is very competitive in which all students must be sponsored by a Member of Congress to become a Page. There are 435 Members of the House of Representatives recommending students for the Page program and only about 66 Page positions available.

This Week in Washington cont.

Tauzin, Pombo Praise GAO for New Natural Gas Study

Washington (October 10) - House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Billy Tauzin (R-LA) and House Resources Committee Chairman Richard Pombo (R-CA), co-chairman of the Speaker's Task Force For Affordable Natural Gas, October 10th praised the Government Accounting Office (GAO) for its important study detailing the severe impact of high natural gas prices on the farming industry, fertilizer producers and the economy.

"This GAO study provides another example of how high natural gas prices have dealt a tremendous blow to our economy," said Chairman Tauzin. "With natural gas costs continuing to rise, farmers have had no choice but to cut agricultural production and lay off workers. Yet America's non-park federal lands contain enough affordable natural gas to stop this crisis. The energy bill currently in conference will go a long way toward easing burdensome restrictions on exploration and development of these vital natural gas reserves. With our nation's farmers and economy clearly suffering, we must pass an energy bill this year -- we simply cannot afford to wait any longer."

"This report should be a wake-up call to some in Congress, but it certainly won't come as any surprise to America's farmers," Chairman Pombo said. "In fact, I'm sure our farmers are sick of reports and politicians telling them what they already know. Congress must act. Outdated policies and red-tape are what caused this massive imbalance in the natural gas market. It's up to us to fix it."

The GAO study, entitled "Domestic Nitrogen Fertilizer Production Depends on Natural Gas Availability and Prices" was conducted at the request of Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) in an effort to determine how the price of natural gas affects the price, production and availability of nitrogen fertilizer and what role the federal government plays in mitigating the impact of natural gas prices on the U.S. fertilizer market.

The GAO found that higher natural gas prices have increased the cost of producing nitrogen fertilizer, which is manufactured using natural gas. As a result, fertilizer producers have had to rely more heavily on foreign imports, causing prices to skyrocket. Farmers have been forced to decrease production by 25 percent causing adverse financial damage to the industry and to the economy.

The entire GAO report can be found at www.gao.gov <<http://www.gao.gov>>. To learn more about the Speaker's Task Force For Affordable Natural Gas visit: <<http://energycommerce.house.gov/NaturalGasTaskForce>> .

(Supreme Court to Decide Pledge Case cont.)

calling the Pledge of Allegiance "an important right that ought to be upheld."

McClellan would not say definitely whether the White House would press its position before the court but previewed what it would argue if it did. "Keep in mind," he said, "that you have a Declaration of Independence that refers to God or the creator four different times. You have sessions of Congress each day that begin with prayer and, of course, if you look on our own currency, it says "In God We Trust.""

Activists on both sides of the church-state divide said the case is a watershed for the court and for public opinion. "This case represents an important opportunity to put a halt to a national effort aimed at removing any religious (*cont. on rt. column*)

Do-not-call list expands

The FTC said Oct. 8, 2003 that consumers can register home or cell-phone numbers with the free government service by visiting the Web site www.donotcall.gov or calling (888) 382-1222. The list is intended to block about 80% of telemarketing calls.

(Supreme Court to Decide Pledge Case cont.)

phrase or reference from our culture," said Jay Sekulow, chief counsel of the American Center for Law and Justice, a law firm founded by the Rev. Pat Robertson.

The Rev. Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, called the pledge case the most controversial issue before the high court in a decade.

The administration, the girl's school and atheist Michael Newdow all asked the Supreme Court to get involved in the case.

The court, however, agreed only to hear the appeal from the school district. The administration will be able to weigh in separately. The court also said it will consider whether Newdow had the proper legal footing to bring the case.

To read the remainder of the article, visit The Las Vegas Sun at the following address:

<http://www.lasvegassun.com/sunbin/stories/bw-scotus/2003/oct/14/101409986.html>